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DE RUEHAS #0075 0221655
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5149
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 8771
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2506
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2117
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 6974
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000075

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ALGERIANS VIEW POTUS TRIP WITH CAUTION, CYNICISM

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas F. Daughton;
reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: President Bush's recent trip to the Middle East attracted considerable if mostly cynical press coverage in Algeria, though the government issued no official statement. In general, press coverage and our MFA contacts indicate that Algerian expectations for the trip were low, specifically on the issue of the creation of a Palestinian state by 2009. Privately, our MFA contacts told us that the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza is damaging any good will that may have come from the President's trip, making the trip look like a fig leaf to allow the Israelis to blockade and retaliate against Gaza using whatever means they choose. Given the consistent Algerian focus on the plight of the Palestinians as presented on Al Jazeera television, it is unlikely that anything short of a full and final peace agreement will elicit any formal support for the POTUS initiative or the Annapolis process from the Algerian government. END SUMMARY.

PRESS REPORTS CYNICAL, LOOKING BEYOND BUSH

¶2. (U) Both French- and Arabic-language media said the President's trip followed two tracks: one focused on Iran, the other on regional Middle East issues. Concerning Iran, the media highlighted Iran's nuclear program and President Bush's efforts to counter it by enlisting the support of Middle Eastern countries. French-language media noted U.S. efforts to promote reform and democracy in the Middle East, as well as the importance of nuclear energy and weapons in the region. Media also remarked that the visit sought to push Arabs to compromise with Israel, following the perceived failure of the Annapolis Conference, and that it was used as a platform to boost the image of Republicans in the 2008 presidential election campaign. Finally, some press opined that Gulf monarchs attached little importance to the visit because they were already looking beyond the Bush administration's final year.

GOVERNMENT: TRIP "GREEN LIGHT" FOR ISRAEL IN GAZA?

¶3. (C) While the local media were quite vocal on the visit, the Algerian government was officially silent. The new U.S. desk officer at the MFA confirmed to us on January 20 that the MFA had not issued a formal statement or taken a position of any kind regarding the trip. Privately, MFA Director General for Arab Affairs Abdelhamid Bouzaher told the Ambassador on January 22 that there were important reactions behind the scenes. Bouzaher said that current images showing the condition of Palestinians in Gaza were voiding any good

will that may have resulted from President Bush's recent trip. He said that Israeli actions towards Gaza, especially the blockade, were seen as "collective punishment" that unfairly affected innocent people. Bouzaher told the Ambassador that some of his MFA colleagues, as well as some Arab diplomats to whom he had spoken, believed that President Bush has used the trip as cover to give Israel a "green light" to act against Gaza.

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